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ABSTRACT

Prejudice built up against the rural citizen and his situation is exemplified in the stereotyping inherent in the pejorative terms "pastoral", "bucolic", "hick", etc., and romantic turn-of-the-century debate over whether "modern degeneracy" should be considered urban- or rural-centered. Such holdover prejudice, built into the political as well as sociolinguistic fabric of the society by the "Progressive Era", now has serious effects on the structure and function of the society. Since dominant ideologies (i.e., urban) do not perceive the problems in the rural portion of society as major, inequitable allocation of federal monies to rural and city people results. Thus, due to their ascribed societal role rural populations now comprise "...a group of people, who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out...in the society...for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination" (Wirth 1945:347). This new perspective on the U.S. non-metropolitan populace as a minority suggests redirection, redirection in terms of the distribution of public funds as well as redirection in terms of the sociology and social research which shapes many underlying societal perceptions. (SC)

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OF HARLEM AND HARLAN:
NON-METROPOLITAN PEOPLE
AS A MINORITY GROUP
(revised August 1980)

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Abstract

OF HARLEM AND HARLAN
NON-METROPOLITAN PEOPLE
AS A MINORITY GROUP

The primary argument presented in this paper is that as an alternate perspective on rural community, non-metropolitan people may be viewed as one of Sagarin's (1971) non-ethnic and non-hereditary "other minorities." Several aspects of the minority status of those people living in communities of less than 50,000 population which are not included in a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area are discussed. These include prejudiced attitudes and stereotypes about rural people, a standard of living comparable to that of the central cities, rural social movements attempting to remedy debilitating social conditions as well as the legacy of the Progressive Era on the thinking of the dominant society. The conclusion consists of a partial listing of research questions on the minority status of non-metropolitan people and the sociology of knowledge.

OF HARLEM AND HARLAN: NON-METROPOLITAN PEOPLE AS A MINORITY GROUP

This paper is a product of the emerging consciousness among an increasing number of people living in non-metropolitan areas[1] that they are (at least metaphorically) a minority group. Among other things, part of being kept in a marginal and subordinate position in society is a given group's inability to gain equitable access to the resources the host society has to offer.

In the seemingly timeless definition offered by Louis Wirth (1945:347) a minority can be defined as:

> ...a group of people, who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination.

Wirth's definition, of course, refers specifically to racial and ethnic groups. It would be a serious mistake to argue that non-metropolitanites are readily identifiable by any physical or cultural characteristic for which they are singled out for discrimination. This problem of definition, however, is diminished by the more recent tendency to broaden this definition to include socially marginal people of all kinds including women, the aged and the physically and mentally handicapped.

Conceptually, much credit must be given to Edward Sagarin (1971:16) in defining the "other minorities."

> If sociologists are to understand the nature of prejudice, of the self-fulfilling prophecy in which people treated as if they were inferior

> develop some of the traits of that inferiority, of the social movements that develop in defense of those denied privileges granted to others, of the conditions under which minorities arise and the conditions under which they cease to be minorities, then it would seem that the concept of the minority group must be broadened to include non-ethnics and nonhereditary persons who fit the other aspects of Wirth's definition: a sense of group identification, a subjective view of themselves as being the victims of collective discrimination and unequal treatment ... at the hands of a dominant group.

Given this broad definition of a minority group, the task then becomes to determine whether non-metropolitan people fit within the definition. If rural people are victimized by collective discrimination, then one would expect to find prejudices and stereotypes within the dominant society which serve to justify differential treatment.

Prejudice and Stereotypes of Rural People

Prejudice, according to Allport (1958:10), "...is an antipathy based on a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed at a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group." A stereotype "...is an exaggerated belief associated with a category." "Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category." (Allport, 1958:187)

Lexicographers present an interesting dichotomy in their efforts to define the term, rural. On the one hand, rural can denote an unrefined, crude, vulgar way of life. "Rustic" refers to the less pleasing aspects of country life or stresses a contrast to the refinements of the city. "Bucolic" may be used to denote the crudity and lack of refinement of rural life or people. On the

other hand, "bucolic" also can be used to denote rural peace and charm, whereas "pastoral" implies an idealized rusticity and separation from urban bustle (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1977:1014).

Adding to Cosby, Falk and McDermott's (1978:8) initial listing, injurious prejudice and stereotypes can be found on both sides of the rustic-pastoral dichotomy. On the rustic side, the English language provides people with a whole list of uncomplimentary terms and concepts including

hick	yokel
hillbilly	hayseed
peasant	bumpkin
rube	oakie
boor	red-neck
boer	good ole boy

It is interesting to note that two of these terms are used as stereotypes by two other minority groups to explain obstacles in their own quest for liberation. The black liberation movement saw "red-necks" as a nemesis while the women's movement refers to a quasi-conspiracy among males to resist the goals of affirmative action as "good ole boyism."

As in the case of any stereotype these negative depictions of rural people not only function as a cause or rationalization for collective discrimination but also result in negative self-images for many of the people at whom these stereotypes are directed.

Although the pastoral side of the dichotomy presents a more positive view of non-metropolitan people, it is nonetheless unrealistic and injurious.

Although the notion of the idyllic countryside precedes the American Revolution, the stereotype of the independent self-sufficient

yeoman-farmer, the heros of the Concord Bridge and Valley Forge, is still part of Americanism training in public education. The anti-urban writings of Henry David Thoreau (1950) and his two year adventure in the woods of Walden Pond underlines the virtues of self-sufficiency, independence and the discovery of moral law through the study of nature afforded only by rural areas. In the 1930's, Scott and Helen Nearing (1970) tried to avoid the downfall of western society by becoming self-sufficient in Vermont. Their book, Living the Good Life, lay somewhat dormant until about the mid-1960s when young people, disillusioned with this country's inability to cope with the problems of war, racism and poverty, followed the Nearing's beckon to a more simple, virtuous and independent lifestyle to wait out the "crunch." Finally, CBS's The Waltons depicts rural family life in the Depression as simple, virtuous and everything that is wholesome about American life.

Although positive, these stereotypes are problematic in that they do not accurately depict what rural life and, in particular, what rural problems are all about. On the national decision-making level these positive stereotypes act as a set of blinders and prisms in the equitable allocation of federal monies to rural areas for such problems as poverty, health care, education and a whole list of problems which is more fully developed in the next section of this essay.

On the local level, these positive stereotypes function to act as an "opiate," preventing people from objectifying on their situation and committing themselves to a reasonable course of action to alleviate their problems.

Prejudiced attitudes and stereotypes, whether a cause or a rationalization, often accompany discriminatory acts. The next section of this paper attempts to define the political context of prejudice and stereotypes against non-metropolitan people.

The Legacy of the Progressive Era

The focus of this section is on how patterns of discrimination against rural people, collectively, became politically institutionalized.

Following Lenski's (1966) theory of social stratification, it is argued here that urban interest groups have such a monopoly on the distribution of surpluses in American society, that when either (a) the interests of rural areas come in conflict with those of urban areas or (b) urban interest groups are competing with their non-metropolitan counterparts for scarce resources, decisions will predictably be made in favor of the urban groups. It is a game based not only on the number of people involved, but also the financial and human resources at the command of various groups as well as their ability to control the prevailing ideology of the times.

Ideology plays a major role in defining what is publicly and officially defined as problematic in a society and, hence, what share of surplus resources are allocated in the attempted resolution of a defined problem. This view is essentially that of the subjectivist approach to social problems. Mauss (1975) notes that very few negative social conditions are ever elevated to the public and political status of a social problem whereby some form of remedial action is taken. To understand social problems one must study the political activity generated by a social movement and its

relationship to specific interest groups in its quest to politically define a given social condition as a problem. In essence, Mauss sees social problems as social movements.

In this light, both the negative and positive stereotypes of non-metropolitan people can be seen as the ideological tools by which urban movements, interest groups and pressure groups maintain an upper hand in the competition for resources and, to a degree, even exploit their non-metropolitan counterparts,

Historically, the turning point in this competition between rural and urban movements to define social problems was the Progressive Era.

Following Lesy's (1973:245-51) analysis, the Progressive Era saw a battle to define what Mauss (1975:3) called the "social construction of reality" between those who saw the rural way of life as debilitating and those who deemed cities as the seedbed of human misery.

Early social scientists such as Robert Dugdale (1910) and Frank Blackmar (1897) attempted to define the living conditions and lifestyles of rural people as problematic. Dugdale argued that one of the "crime cradles" of New York state was not the slums or the Irish or German immigrants who occupied them, but rather the rural areas of the state. He then undertook a study of an inbred joint family, the Jukes, whose members were systematically involved in prostitution "...assault, murder, attempted rape and cruelty to animals," and had high rates of alcoholism and active or hereditary syphilis. Ultimately, "...Dugdale defined rural poverty in terms of sexual appetite and rural crime in terms of a degeneration of the senses." (Lesy, 1973:245-46)

Blackmar (2897), in his study of a Kansas family known as the Smoky Pilgrims, documented and analyzed a rural lifestyle similar to that of the Jukes. Blackmar saw rural problems as being related to "economic overcrowding" (too many people for the number of jobs) as well as "lying and exaggeration, obscenity and boredom, filthiness and illiteracy, (and) fornication and intemperence..." as the primary causes of rural problems. (Lesy, 1973:247)

At the same time, intellectuals such as George Beard (1881) and Max Nordeau (1968) were pointing at the urban way of life as the cause of the "downfall of American Civilization." In American Nervousness, Beard observed that the upper classes of the North and East no longer had the positive "nervous energy" of people of the past. The chief cause of this decreased positive energy and the increase in counter-productive nervousness was modern (urban) civilization, particularly steam power, (factories) the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences and the mental activity of women. (Lesy, 1973:248)

Some fifteen years after Beard, Nordeau wrote of the physical and moral degeneracy of philosophers, musicians, novelists, poets, artists and the like and placed them in the same category as prostitutes, criminals, anarchists and pronounced lunatics. The cause of this degeneration was the result of the massive and longtime poisoning of urban people through drugs, alcohol, tobacco, tainted food, processed food, and so on. (Lesy, 1973:249)

By today's standards, arguments on both sides seem absurd. Nonetheless, the "urban degeneration" theme set the basic ideological framework for more particularist movements of that era and for the institutionalization of the ideas of these movements into the

so-called "welfare state."

Although space does not allow for a more detailed analysis, following Mauss (1975), more particularist movements which either started in the Progressive Era or were directly influenced by it were many. On the issue of juvenile delinquency, sincere individualized lobbying efforts began at the end of the 19th century and in 1907 the National Council of Crime and Delinquency was formed. One of the goals of the NCCD was the establishment of the juvenile court system.

The anti-alcohol movement with movement organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Anti-Saloon League and the Prohibition Party was aimed primarily at the drinking patterns of urban immigrants. Anti-crime efforts did not emerge full-blown until the 1920s, but were related to Progressive thinking in that the movement was urban-oriented and organized crime was, in part, an unanticipated consequence of Prohibition.

The consumer protection movement had largely urban overtones as it initially arose, in part, because of the poisonous additives used to preserve and process food for urban people who were geographically removed from the source of the food supply. The first Pure Food and Drug Act was passed in 1906.

The Harrison Act of 1914 outlawed the use of opium for other than medicinal purposes and also created the Narcotics division of the Treasury Department.

Anti-prostitution movements gathered headway in the United States with the founding of the American Social Hygiene Association in 1913.

The issue of mental hygiene was resurrected in 1908 with the publication of Clifford Beers' A Mind that Found Itself (1908) and the same year saw the foundation of the Connecticut Foundation for Mental Hygiene. The foundation of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene occurred one year later.

Although the social welfare movement began before the Progressive Era, this period saw an increase in the number of organizations --e.g., the National Child Labor Committee and the American Association of Labor Legislation--and a flurry of state and federal laws and court decisions.

Last, the Progressive Era witnessed the development of the functionalist approach to education which turned the emphasis of public education away from educating elites alone to providing public education for the lower classes to prepare them for their "place" in society.

Meanwhile, rural advocates backed off from their assertions and the Dugdales and the Blackmars were replaced by the L. H. Baileys who idealized the life style of the country gentleman and who saw the salvation of rural areas in terms of the out-migration of the urban upper classes (Lesy, 1973:250-51).

The early movements of the Progressive Era are currently more fully institutionalized as is their fundamentally urban orientation. The Federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare administers programs and provides sponsorship and funding for research and model programs for the resolution of these and other problems within, for the most part, an urban context.

The early movements have evolved into interest and pressure groups including occupational, moral, scientific, political,

economic and others, which for both humanitarian reasons and self-interest maintain these issues as problems.

For example, the issue of poverty involves an interesting blend of humanitarianism and self-interest for a variety of different groups. To provide help for the (deserving) poor or to help the poor help themselves is a well-established American value. However, outside of these humanitarian goals, various interest groups have additional factors riding on the issue.

For churches as moral interest groups, poverty provides fodder for the sermons of both conservative and liberal denominations, recruits for many cults or sects, work for missionaries in the skid-row districts, and matching federal funds for some church-sponsored programs.

For political parties, the poor may provide votes for one political party because of the programs for the poor contained in its platform. If that party acquires sufficient power to implement its program, the issues as to the cost of the program or its feasibility of accomplishing its desired ends becomes ammunition for the opponent party.

Social scientists as a group tend to gain from the issue by applying to the federal government to research poverty, by writing articles and books about the topic as well as being paid to teach courses about poverty and inequality.

Occupationally, social workers' jobs and careers ride on the issue of poverty.

On either side of the issue, various economic interest groups have much at stake. Groups representing business concerns lobby against some anti-poverty legislation because of its cost, through

taxation to corporations and the wealthy. Some labor unions, on the other hand, hope to organize underpaid workers in order to extend the influence and power of the union or the union movement.

The other legacy of the Progressive Era was to define these as urban problems. Using sociologists as an example of scientific interest group (although not a product of conscious discrimination) the recent sociological literature on social problems in a rural context with the exception of rural education is a near void. "Broad based" texts on social problems contain no mention of drug abuse, violence, alcoholism, etc., with a rural context. It is currently vogue today in many introductory text books to delete the chapter on community and replace it with one on urbanization. With respect to "mainstream" sociology, social problems are urban problems; rural America does not exist.

Rural sociologists, by perceiving their mandate as serving the needs of extension services and Land Grant Colleges and having their research priorities set by the Department of Agriculture have, in the past, failed to fill this void.

In short, because of the urban orientation of the Progressive Era and the more particularistic movements incorporated within it, many interest groups still maintain the Progressive image of social problems as being basically urban in nature. Additionally, because resources to solve social problems are scarce, this ideology also functions to prevent non-metropolitan Americans from competing for these resources.

Minority Movements and Minority Problems

This inertia has been maintained in spite of the efforts of

several movements to "get the ball moving." The Populist Movement which preceded the Progressive Era was distinctly rural. The Industrial Workers of the World had a largely rural appeal among mine and railroad workers. During the Depression, efforts were made by various unions to organize farmers, tenant farmers, migrant laborers, mill workers, miners and others. This was also the golden age of the protest folk singer with notables such as Florence Reece, Aunt Molly Jackson, Leadbelly, Cisco Houston, Lee Hayes, Woody Guthrie and others singing about the plight of sharecroppers, miners, Dust Bowl refugees and others. After World War II, Henry Wallace tried to forge a farm and labor coalition for his quest for the Presidency. Various farm organizations such as the National Farmers Organization and American Agricultural Movement have been vocal in expressing the needs of family farmers. Ralph Nader's group has led the crusade against agri-business. Much of the Environmental Movement is rural (although not exclusively) oriented. Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers organization is trying to organize (mostly Chicano) farm workers. Later arrivals include the Rural Caucus, Rural America, and the National Rural Center.

In addition to the issues represented by these movements, problems which give an indication of the minority group status of non-metropolitan people are outlined below. It is interesting to note that some of these are also major issues in urban ghettos.

1. With the exception of small communities within SMSA's (suburbs), poverty rates vary inversely with community size. The mean percentage of people falling below poverty guidelines for non-metropolitan communities is 18.3%, for

metropolis, 11.8% and for the suburbs 9.4%. For towns under 2,500 population, the mean rate is 21.3% with the mean tapering off to 15.0% for non-metropolitan communities of 25,000-49,999 population (Dommel and Jaffe, 1978:27).

2. With the exception of the suburbs, mean per capita income varies directly with community size. The average per capita income for all non-metropolitan communities is $4085 per year with the smallest communities (less than 2,500 population) having the lowest amount of $3778 and the largest communities of 25,000-49,999 population having the highest of $4557. The mean of $4085 compares with $5174 for large cities and $5363 for the suburbs (Dommel and Jaffe, 1978:29).
3. Unemployment rates in the country (6.0%) are comparable to those in the city (6.2%). However, the proportion of non-metropolitan communities with rates of 8.5% or more is 15.9% which is 50% higher than the 10.9% for their urban counterpart (Dommel and Jaffe, 1978:39).
4. Although slums, ghettos and barrios are urban cliches, housing conditions are disproportionately worse in rural areas. Almost 54% of all housing in non-urban communities was built before 1940, compared with 35.3% for cities.

Communities with less than 2,500 population registered a high of 60.0%. Over-crowded housing is slightly higher in non-metropolitan communities (7.8%) when compared to urban settlements (7.3%). (Dommel and Jaffe, 1978:42-45)

5. Because of high population growth rates, distance from major distribution points coupled with higher costs of fuel, as well as fewer discount retail outlets, the rate of inflation may well be higher than the national rate.(Wall Street Journal, 1979:1+)
6. The educationally disadvantaged state of rural people can be documented as follows: In 1967, 19% of the urban population had attained a college education compared to only 11% for the rural adult population; 28% of rural non-farm and 23% of farm youth ages 14-24 dropped out before graduating, compared with 21% for urban youth and twice the proportion of urban youth went on to college (President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, 1967:41). By all indications, this pattern had not been resolved during the 1970s. In 1974, 59.8% of central city and 68.5% of suburbanites had completed high school compared to 53.9% of rural youths. Additionally, only 42.5% of adults in rural counties (with no

town over 2,500) completed high school (National Manpower Institute, 1978:9). In 1978, although non-metropolitan youth composed 32% of school age people only 5% of HEW research money, 11% of library and materials funds, 13% of vocational aid, and the same percentage of dropout prevention monies went to non-metropolitan schools. (Wachtel, 1979:12).

7. Because of a narrow economic base, rural youths have few occupational role models other than farmwork, blue collar and marginal positions from which to choose (National Manpower Institute, 1978:8).

8. The health status of non-metropolitan Americans is far below that of their urban counterpart. In 1964, one-third of all maternal deaths occurred in towns of less than 10,000 inhabitants. Rural people, particularly the aged, are more likely than urbanites to have disabling chronic health problems as well as having higher rates of injuries from both motor vehicle and work related accidents. In general, rural people are less likely to utilize the services of a physician and have less access to medical facilities. (President's National Commission on Rural Poverty, 1967:59-63). Recently, HEW reacted to these and other health statistics by allocating 99.9% of Health

Maintenance Organization (HMO) development money to cities. More specifically, although by statute, 20% of all HMO development money is supposed to go to rural areas, in 1978 only 8.8% reached the country. Over the next ten years, 61 priority metropolitan areas are targeted for OHMO funding, with no rural population cited. (Rural Health Council, 1979:2-3)

9. Despite the cliches of "clean air" and "clean water" in the country, environmental health issues in rural areas are numerous and include: (a) the pollution of the aquafer and wells, due to the legal and illegal dumping of industrial wastes of urban origin, (b) Reyes Syndrome resulting from spraying for spruce budworm, (c) miscarriages and birth defects stemming from the use of Vietnam surplus defoliants and (d) the exposure of rural people to high levels of radiation due to several sources including the mining, refining and dumping of radioactive material and the above-ground testing of atomic weapons in the 1940-50's.

10. Increasingly rural remedies to urban problems are being proposed and implemented. The use of rural areas as dumping grounds for radioactive and other wastes has already been cited.

In addition to these one might also include the following: (a) the flooding of large tracts of land to meet urban induced "peak power" needs (Dickey-Lincoln) or to relieve the problems of suburbanites who bought a home in a development located on a flood plain; (b) the Kemeny Commission's decision that nuclear power plants are too dangerous to be located in those densely populated areas that they primarily serve; (c) the dissection of farmlands to improve power networks to prevent urban power blackouts; (d) the termination of traditional recreational usage of public lands by their official designation as "wilderness areas," and (e) the environmental destruction of, the disruption of life styles of and the making of a primary military target out of approximately one-third of the State of Nevada and 25% of Utah because of the proposed MX missile system.

11. I.Q. tests are urban biased, and so on.

Summary and Conclusions

In summation, Sagarin's definition of nonethnic and non-racial "other minorities" is employed for an analytic framework for the assessment of non-metropolitan people as a minority group. Prejudice is evident in the language used to describe rurality and stereotypes are plentiful. Positive stereotypes of the idyllic pastoral

rural lifestyle are also injurious in that they serve as a means of both rationalizing the inattention given to rural areas and of preventing rural people from objectifying on their situation.

The primary reason cited for the prejudice against non-metropolitan areas is the mental set established during the Progressive Era which established the urban lifestyle as the basic cause of social problems, in spite of the efforts of early social scientists such as Dugdale and Blackmar.

Most contemporary social problems today are viewed as exclusively urban problems because of the urban orientation of the Progressive social movements that elevated certain social conditions to the status of social problems. Contemporary social problem interest groups, because of the urban legacy of the Progressive Era, still maintain the social definition of social problems in an urban context. Rustic and idyllic stereotypes serve as rationalizations for not extending these problems to rural areas because of the scarcity of resources available nationally.

Although a variety of social movements in the past and in the present have tried to call national attention to the problem, they have met with little success in resolving a number of problems including the plight of the family farmer, working conditions in rural areas, rural poverty, rural education, non-metropolitan housing, and a number of other issues.

Consideration of non-metropolitan people as a minority and the problems they encounter as such would not only add a new dimension to the understanding of the structure and process of minority group relations, but also greatly add to the sociological body of knowledge in other areas of human experience, which, unfortunately is

built on too many vague generalities, misconceptions and fallacious assumptions about the rural experience.

The remainder of this paper is dedicated to generating at least a partial list of research questions. This list is divided into two parts. The first is concerned with generating research projects that would lend greater understanding of minority group relations including non-metropolitanites. The second part deals with potential research projects that would aid in debunking the urban bias of contemporary sociological theory.

The Non-metropolitan Minority

In the cases of oppressed minorities, history is viewed as the uphill struggle by blacks, chicanos, native Americans and women to liberate themselves, once and for all, from the shackles of slavery, conquest or tradition. For rural Americans, however, history is quite the opposite. It represents the downward slide of a substantial number of people from a once dominant group to an inferior position. What, then, were the economic, political, social and cultural forces at work that lead to the loss of status of non-metropolitan Americans? How will this "reversal of historical perspective" add to and impact standard sociological assumptions about the roots of prejudice and discrimination?

Racial minority groups and women are identified by inherited physical characteristics and, in part, because of these characteristics are singled out for differential treatment by the broader society. Members of ethnic minorities, on the other hand, are singled out for discrimination by a readily identifiable cultural characteristic such as last name, clothing or religion. Yet rural

men and women are racially and ethnically heterogeneous. In spite of popular stereotypes to the contrary, non-metropolitan people are simply not recognizable as being distinct from the broader society. The question then arises, how are discriminatory practices meted out against a group which physically and culturally is indistinguishable from the broader society? If the answer can be found under the ruberic of demography, to what degree are the life chances of racial minority groups limited not only by their racial characteristics but also on the basis of where they live? If it is demonstrated that this "blind" demographic discrimination is a strong operating force in American society, how would this impact social-psychological theories of racism which emphasize past learning and interpersonal relations as a primary cause of racial problems?

It is the goal of most minority groups to seek adequate representation in government. By doing so it is hoped that, by securing as many elected and appointed posts in local, state and Federal government, the problems faced by a given group will (slowly) be abated through the democratic process. Numerically, however, non-metropolitans are fairly represented in the House of Representatives. In 1970, non-metropolitan Americans constituted more than 31% of the population and 30.3% of all House districts were composed of constituencies of more than 51% rural. Yet social conditions in most rural areas are as bad as those in the central city, and in some cases much worse. Is the sheer number of Representatives the solution or does it lie in the quality of representation? How democratic are those processes from which minority groups seek their vindication?

The plight of some racial minority groups living in rural areas has been well publicized--chicano migrant farm workers and native

Americans on reservations, in particular. However, how does the situation of many non-metropolitan people parallel that of these two cases? How are the working conditions and wages in many wood turning mills and poultry processing plants similar to those in the field? In what ways have the human needs of native Americans on reservations been deferred to the desires of economic interest groups within the Department of the Interior? In what ways have the needs of blacks, hispanics and whites likewise been deferred in a like manner in both the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture as well as in the respective House Committees which are supposed to oversee the activities of these agencies?

With respect to ethnic studies, one could almost believe from the literature that European immigrants got "off the boat" in Eastern cities and never left. However, as Lundquist and Carver (1927) pointed out, in 1920, the percentage of foreign born in communities of 2,500 population or less constituted 6.5% of the rural population whereas the native whites of foreign or mixed parentage was 13.5%. In short, 20% of all the people in exclusively rural communities at the time were ethnics and an even higher percentage could be expected for communities of less than 50,000. What were the experiences of these people? How were they similar to or different from those who settled in the city? Why has the ethnic experience in rural America been permanently enshrined in local and state historical society collections with little national consideration?

Clearly, the contemporary study of race and ethnic relations has a distinct urban bias since the riots in urban areas like Watts

and Detroit stole the limelight from the freedom rides and the bridge at Selma. What is the source of the tendency of present day sociologists to view race relations as an almost exclusive urban problem? What insights can be gained from studying patterns of prejudice and discrimination on racial, ethnic and social class lines in smaller communities where such patterns have less of a chance to be crosscut and confused by other variables?

The Urban Bias of Contemporary Sociological Thought

The above list begs yet another question--is contemporary American sociology urban biased? Why have social conditions in non-metropolitan communities been ignored for the past forty years? Is there a reluctance on the part of the Department of Agriculture to fund social problems research in rural areas? Likewise, are the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Labor so wrapped up in the progressive myth that little research money is allocated to non-metropolitan areas?

There is some indication that some Federal agencies are beginning to take an interest in social problems in rural areas (see, for example, National Manpower Institute, 1978; Report of the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, 1979; and Task Panel Reports Submitted to the President's Commission on Mental Health, 1978). Although some information on the effects of the minority status of non-metropolitan people can be found in these and other government reports, in many areas, little can be found in the sociological literature. Is American sociology actually urban sociology? What was the net effect of the demographers in the Chicago School (e.g., Park and Burgess, 1925; Faris and Dunham, 1939; and Shaw and McKay, 1942) in defining, for

the profession, social problems as urban problems? Are contemporary structural-functional constructs so bound up in imported European concepts of the rural feudal community that they fail to accurately depict contemporary rural American lifestyles? Is contemporary mainstream American sociology so urban bound that it is inappropriate to non-metropolitan communities?

In closing, the intent of this paper was to create a new perspective on rural communities--that of non-metropolitan people as a minority group. By opening up such a new perspective it is hoped that new avenues of sociological research will be opened up in the areas of rural sociology, intergr p relations and the sociology of knowledge.

FOOTNOTE

[1]Non-metropolitan is used here to refer to communities with population of less than 50,000 people. Unless otherwise specified, non-metropolitan is used interchangeably with rural, small town, country and any other non-urban referrant.

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